

Because It's Different by JoMo3

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Summary:

Eleven has her first day of school.

Because It's Different

Will you be like my brother?

What? No...no.

Why no?

Because...because it's different.

Why?

I don't know, I guess it's not. It's stupid.

The sun was setting on a warm spring day in Hawkins, Indiana. Eleven Jane Hopper and her boyfriend Mike Wheeler were in his backyard, Mike pushing her on a tire swing his father had recently installed.

Usually El would be enjoying a time like this; spending time alone with Mike, and enjoying the warm weather after being confined to a building for most of her childhood. But all she could think about was what would happen tomorrow:

School.

For the past few months El had been receiving tutoring a few times a week to try and catch her up. Her tutor now believed El to be ready for school.

The current school year was ending in a few weeks, but Joyce and Hopper had thought it may be a good idea for El to get her feet wet (a phrase Mike had to explain to her) and finish the school year so she knew what she'd be getting into in the fall.

So Joyce and Hopper had pulled some strings with Principal Coleman, and she would be joining the boys at school tomorrow.

She had six classes; 5 of which included one/some/all of the boys.

The one class she didn't share with them was remedial English; as smart as she was, El still wasn't the best reader.

Nancy had taken her out to buy a few new clothes for her first week; bright pink and blue tops, a jean skirt, and some clips for her growing head of hair. She already had them lying on her dresser for the morning.

But she was feeling... *nervous*, was the word Hopper had used. What if the other kids were mean? What if she got separated from the boys and couldn't find her way around? What if she forgot something in the morning? What if...

"El?"

Mike's voice snapped her out of her daydream. He had noticed she'd gotten quieter than usual and had stopped pushing her.

"Yes?" she asked, looking up at him.

"What's wrong?"

She kicked at the grass. "School."

"Are you nervous?"

She nodded her head.

He kneeled so they could face each other. "There's no need to be, El. You're gonna do great."

"What if...what if the other kids don't like me?"

"Of course they'll like you, El."

"But...what if they're mean?"

He sighed. "Not everybody's mean, El. There's a lot of nice people at school. And those who aren't are just...jerks."

"Mouth breathers?"

"Yeah. Mouth breathers."

She smiled shyly.

“But El, we’re going to be there to help you. Me, Lucas, Dustin, and Will, okay? You’re one of us now.” Then, grinning, added “Whether you like it or not.”

She smiled at him, then scooted closer to give him a quick kiss. “Thank you.”

He smiled back at her. “You’re welcome.”

He stood up, and offered his hand to help her out of the swing. The two ate dinner with the rest of the Wheeler family, then Mike biked with Eleven back home.

They hugged each other before she went in, and kissed; their kissing was lasting a little longer these days.

Pulling away, El gave him a smile as she went into Hopper’s trailer.

The next morning found Mike riding back to Hopper’s home. He wanted to surprise El and ride with her to school.

He skidded to a stop when he reached his destination, then climbed the four steps and knocked on the door.

Hopper, in his uniform, answered the knock. He gave Mike a once over, then said “What’re you doing here, Wheeler?”

“Um, hi, Chief. I was going to ride with El to school, sir.”

Hopper sighed. He had been looking forward to driving El to school, but it just now dawned on him she’d have to get home.

“Tell you what, kid,” Hopper said, moving aside so Mike could come in. “I’ll drive you to school, and the two of you can put your bikes in the back of the truck for the ride home. Sound good?”

“Yes, sir.”

Hopper nodded. "Ellie!" he called. "Let's go, you have a visitor."

Mike heard a door open, and then El came in, looking pretty as always. Her face brightened when she saw him standing next to Hopper.

"Hi, Mike," she said.

"Hey, El."

"Mike here came to ride with you to school. I'm gonna drive you two. Go get your bikes, put 'em in my truck," Hopper said. "I'll be out in a minute."

The two teens went outside, and El brought her bike from behind the trailer.

El couldn't help but notice the grin on Mike's face. Curious, she asked, "Mike?"

"Hop called me Mike," he said, happy that the chief was beginning to warm up to him.

Mike put his bike into the back of Hopper's truck, and then lifted El's bike as well. "Are you still nervous?"

El nodded her head.

"You're going to be fine," Mike told her. "Plus, our first class is with Mr. Clarke, so it'll be easy."

El smiled lightly, as she took Mike's hand.

Hopper came out of the trailer, holding something in his hand. Holding it up, he called "Forgot your backpack, El."

She smiled; it had been a surprise. Letting go of Mike's hand, she got it from Hopper and gave him a hug before taking the pink backpack.

"Let's go," Hopper said. The kids climbed into the back and resumed holding hands while Hopper headed towards Hawkins Middle School.

Once they arrived, Hopper told them goodbye as the kids climbed out of the car. The two walked their bikes to the bike rack where Will, Dustin, and Lucas were waiting.

“Where *were* you, Mike?” Lucas asked as he moved aside for Mike and El to put their bikes away.

“I rode to El’s to come to school with her,” Mike said. “I called you on your Supercomm but you didn’t pick up. C’mon.”

The group made their way to the school; once they got to the front of the building, Mike took El’s hand again. Looking at her, he asked “Are you ready?”

Eleven sighed, and quietly answered “Yes.”

The group walked inside. The boy’s lockers were in one part of the building, El’s a little further down. They stopped at the boys’ first; El stood next to Mike, shyly watching as a few of the other students walked by, looking at the new girl.

The next stop was El’s locker. She struggled at first with the combination, but eventually figured it out. She’d brought some things from home to put inside; a picture of her and the boys, a picture of her and Hopper, some stickers, and, of course, a picture of she and Mike (which got Mike blushing).

The group then made their way to Mr. Clarke’s class, where he smiled at the boys, and said hi to the new kid.

Sitting down, El was immediately intimidated by the large number of kids in the room. Seeing she was getting nervous, Mike, seated next to her, squeezed her hand.

“It’s okay, El,” he told her. She gave him a weak smile in return.

She watched as Troy came into the room, and Molly Jones, Mike’s partner from before. Molly gave El a small wave.

Soon after, the class began. Mr. Clarke introduced El to everyone as

“Eleanor,” the name he’d been told by the boys before. After that, he began his science lecture. El watched Mike and the boys taking notes, and decided she should do the same thing. Going into her backpack, she pulled out a notebook and tried to keep up with what Mr. Clarke was saying, but he was speaking too fast for her. By the end of class, she had a few scattered words in her notebook and hadn’t understood most of what he’d said.

The bell rang, and the class began gathering their materials.

Turning to El, Mike smiled and asked “How’d you like it?”

El shrugged her shoulders. “It was okay.”

“Okay?” Lucas asked. “Mr. Clarke is the coolest!”

“Eleanor,” Mr. Clarke said, coming over to the group. “Was I going too fast for you? I noticed you were struggling a little there.”

El zipped up her backpack. “Kind of.”

“Well, I apologize for that,” Mr. Clarke explained. “There’s a test coming up, and I wanted to get as much material into class today as I could. But don’t worry, not everyday is like this, okay?”

“Okay.”

He gave her a smile. “Well, again, welcome to Hawkins Middle School.”

The next class was math, which El had been looking forward to, as it was her favorite subject. The teacher, Mrs. Thompson, began the class by giving them a problem to solve in their notebooks. El finished quickly, which made her feel better. In this class she was with Dustin and Mike, and the three of them sat in the back row. As El waited for the rest of the class to finish, Mike slipped a folded piece of paper onto her desk.

She looked at it, confused, then turned to Mike. He mouthed “open it” to her.

Inside it said “You look really pretty today.”

Blushing, she looked at him; he was trying to finish the problem but was smiling and blushing, too.

She wrote back “Thank you” with a heart around the words. She went to put it on his desk when the teacher called her out.

“Ms. Hopper? Are you writing notes?”

El’s eyes got as wide as saucers. “S-sorry,” she said. She put the paper in her pocket and lowered her head.

“Ms. Thompson, it’s my fault, I wrote a note to her” Mike began.

“Don’t let it happen again, you two,” Ms. Thompson warned.

After math class, she had the only class without the boys-reading. After switching out books from her locker, Mike walked her to her room, 219.

“Where’s your room?” El asked, looking at the room numbers.

“305,” Mike answered.

El looked worried. “But you’ll be late, Mike.”

Mike shrugged. “It’s okay. I wanted to make sure you got here okay.”

Arriving at 219, the two faced each other.

“I’ll see you at lunch,” Mike said; after third period their grade level had lunch. He pointed down the hall to a big room. “It’s in there, okay? I’ll wait for you outside.”

El nodded her head. “Thank you.” She gave him a kiss on the cheek as the bell rang, causing her to jump.

The two said goodbye to each other as Mike headed towards his class. Taking a deep breath, El went inside 219.

The room wasn't as full as her previous two classes. Not sure how to start, she walked to the front of the room. The teacher sat at his desk, looking at papers. He peered over glasses at El, and gave her a half smile.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

"Um..." El started. "I'm new."

"Oh. Well, welcome to Hawkins Middle School. What's your name?"

"El."

"Elle," he said, nodding his head. "Nice to meet you. My name is Mr. Ferguson. Why don't you go take a seat, okay?"

She nodded, and turned around. Not knowing where to sit, she took a seat by the window.

Sitting down, she opened her backpack and got out one of her notebooks and waited for the class to begin.

A few more students trickled in, none of them sitting directly next to El.

Mr. Ferguson began the lesson, discussing a story the class was supposed to have read in their textbooks. El dug hers out and tried to skim the story, but Mr. Ferguson was already giving the students their assignment for the period.

They were to work in groups of three to answer questions on a worksheet and then share their answers with the class.

The students begin grouping up; El looked around, but nobody came to her. Feeling dejected, El began answering the questions on her own.

"Mr. Ferguson!" a girl on the other side of the room called. "We only have two, is that okay?"

The teacher shook his head. "No, you need to...Lindsay, pair up with..." he looked at El. "Tell me your name again?"

Softly, she replied, “El.”

“Work with Elle here.”

Lindsay sighed, and she and her partner made their way over to El.

The three girls shifted their desks so they were facing one another. “Are you new here?” Lindsay asked.

El nodded her head. “Yes.”

“Where’d you come from?” the other girl asked.

“Bad place,” El said softly.

“Sorry,” the girl said, then added “I like your skirt.”

El smiled. “Thank you.”

“Hm.” Lindsay looked at the worksheet. “The first question says we need to go to page 15 and look for...”

“It’s here,” El said, showing the girls her paper. She’d already answered the first two questions.

“Hey, cool, thanks,” the other girl said. El beamed.

The three spent the next few minutes working together and answering the remaining questions. When they had finished, the other girl (Hannah) took on the task of sharing their answers with the class. As the bell rang, El told the two girls goodbye as they gathered their things. She wondered if they would become friends.

Mike was waiting for her outside of the lunchroom. Seeing her approach, he smiled and asked how her reading class had gone.

“Good,” she said. “I met some nice girls.”

“Cool,” Mike said, nodding his head. “Let’s go eat.”

Holding hands, the duo entered the lunchroom. El was overwhelmed

by the crowd and the loudness in the room. Mike gave her hand a squeeze and the two got in line for lunch.

Eventually they joined their friends at a table.

“How are you liking school so far?” Will asked.

El nodded her head. “It’s different. But nice.”

The group ate lunch and talked about their day so far; El talking about the girls in her reading class, and the boys about their other classes. Under the table, El’s hand found Mike’s and they held hands the rest of lunch.

When lunch was over, they talked about the afternoon; El had geography with Lucas, then art with Will and Dustin, and finally speech with Will.

As they gathered their trash, El looked sad. Turning to Mike, she said “I wanted another class with you.”

“Me too,” he said, getting her trash for her. “But I’ll see you after school, okay?”

“El, come on,” Lucas called as he grabbed his backpack.

El turned and gave Mike a kiss that lasted longer than Lucas thought was necessary (and made Mike red), then grabbed her backpack and left with Lucas.

“You can’t do that,” he told her as they walked.

“Do what?”

“Make out with your boyfriend in school like that.”

“Make out?”

“Yeah, you know....kiss for a long time.”

She looked confused. “Why?”

“It’s....it’s something private, El.”

"I can't kiss Mike?"

"You *can* ," Lucas assured her, not wanting Mike to get mad at him later, "Just....not like that. Not in school."

Eleven nodded.

Geography went well. The class learned about Australia and the teacher, Ms. Heffernan, was nice.

After, Lucas walked her to the art room. Dustin and Will had saved a seat for her. The class learned about perspective, and were instructed on drawing buildings. Will's came out great, and Dustin's was decent, but El struggled with her picture. After trying for a few minutes, she put down her pencil and folded her arms.

"What's wrong?" Will asked.

"I can't do it," she said.

"Yes you can, El," Will said, turning to her. "It just takes some getting used to." He sketched a building, and showed her how the lines should go to show depth.

Sighing, she tried as well, and felt a smile grow on her face as she did a better job.

"There you go," Dustin said, patting her back.

By the time the bell rang she had a few buildings sketched that she was proud of.

Will walked with her to their last class, speech. When they arrived, Will introduced El to the teacher, Mrs. Hanoway, and the two took a seat in the front row.

Hopper and Joyce had suggested speech to try and help El with her communication skills. When Will had first returned, he would, at

times, close up and not want to talk to anyone as a result of his Upside Down time. The class had helped him, and Joyce and Hopper were hoping it would help El, too.

Mrs. Hanoway began talking, telling the class about the day's assignment: they were going to discuss/share a time when they had an opinion changed; where they thought one way, but something made them think another. The class would have 10 minutes to prepare a speech, and would then address the class.

Will and El turned to each other to talk. Will told El he was going to talk about a time Jonathan changed his tastes in music; before, he wouldn't even think of listening to songs by The Clash, but Jonathan had opened him up to new kinds of music.

El couldn't think of anything. When Will finished and looked to her to share what she would discuss, she drew a blank; and by then, Mrs. Hanoway was calling for the class' attention.

Students began to share. One girl talked about how she originally hated carrot cake but her grandmother's homemade one changed her mind. Another boy talked about how he thought school was boring but a teacher introduced him to poetry. Will shared his, and then it was time for El.

She nervously went to the front of the class, not sure of what to say.

"Um..." she stuttered.

The eyes of the students bore into her, and suddenly she wasn't in the classroom; in her mind, it was as if she were back in the lab, scientists looking at her, expecting something from her that she wasn't sure she could do. She began to take quick breaths.

"El?" Will asked from his seat.

She let out a sob, turned, and left the room.

She ended up in the girls restroom, legs to her chest, head in her arms, sitting on a toilet seat, crying. She felt stupid. She knew she

wasn't in the lab, she *knew* it. But seeing all of those eyes on her when she wasn't ready brought back bad memories.

She heard the bathroom door open. "El?" It was Will's voice.

Sniffling, she lifted her head. "Will?"

She heard his feet walk until he was outside of the stall. She could see his sneakers underneath the door. "Are you alright?" he asked.

"What are you doing in the girls room?" she asked.

"Well, I asked Mrs. Hanoway if I could go and find you, I told her we were friends. I know I'm not supposed to be in here, but..."

It was quiet for a moment, before he continued. "Are you okay?"

"No," she said, putting her head back in her arms.

The door of the ladies room opened, and she saw Will's feet quickly shuffle into the stall next to her and the door shut. They were both silent as whoever came in used the bathroom, washed their hands, and left.

Next door, Will let out a sigh of relief. "That was close."

El wiped her nose on her sleeve.

"What's wrong?" Will asked.

"In class. I felt like I was back...there."

"The Upside Down?" Will asked, fear in his voice.

"No," she said, shaking her head. "The lab. Papa."

"Oh." Since his return, Will had gotten a lot of background information on Eleven. "Why?"

"I couldn't think of anything. And...I didn't like when people looked at me like that. In the lab. Waiting for me."

She heard Will shuffling his feet. "I was like that too, when I came

back. There were times when I felt like I was in the Upside Down. I would wake up screaming, or...there was one time in class I swore the...the..." his voice got shaky and she heard him taking deep breaths. Just when she was about to call his name, he continued. "I thought the teacher was the monster. And I started screaming and crying."

El put her feet on the floor. "The boys didn't tell me that."

"They don't know," Will said. "I was so embarrassed. My mom had to come and get me. But El..." she heard the door to the stall he was in open. "It's not real. You're not in the lab. I'm not in the Upside Down. And no one here wants to hurt us, okay? And if you don't want to talk yet, just tell the teacher. She'll understand. You're safe. You're okay. You'll get better."

Standing up, she opened the stall and hugged him. "Thank you, Will."

The two went back to class and finished the rest of the period. Mrs. Hanoway asked El to stay after a few minutes to talk about what had happened. After she reassured El that she didn't have to speak if she didn't want to, El thanked her and walked with Will (who'd waited in the hall) to the bike rack.

Mike was waiting for them, sitting on the nearby bleachers, Dustin and Lucas' bikes already gone. Will gave El a nod and got his bike, deciding to give the two some privacy.

She sat next to Mike on the bleachers. "Sorry I made you wait."

"No, El, don't worry. How was your first day?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I had a..problem...in my last class." She told him what happened.

Mike put his arm around her. "I'm sorry, El. I wish I could've been there."

"It's okay," she said. "Will helped me." She looked up into his eyes. "But thank you. Will's a good friend. And you're a good boyfriend."

She leaned in to kiss him, but stopped herself.

“What’s wrong?” Mike asked.

“Lucas...he said we shouldn’t kiss in school. He said it was...pirate.”

Mike raised an eyebrow. “Do you mean private?”

She nodded her head.

“Well, Lucas isn’t here,” he said, cupping her chin, bringing her closer, and kissing her.

Smiling into it, El thought, maybe school isn’t so bad after all.

A few days later in speech, El told her story. She talked about how she didn’t think she would like school, but thanks to her friends, she thinks she may give it a try.

Author's Note:

Thank you for reading. I love kudos and comments.